

Senior Executive Intelligence Brief

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Table of Contents

Regional Notes

Israel: Questioning Future US Engagement	3
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Israel:

Questioning Future US Engagement

Some Israeli officials assess the attack against a US convoy in the Gaza Strip in mid-October will increase US sympathy for Israeli counterterrorism efforts, even as other Israelis are anxious that US interest in the peace process could wane. [redacted] initial Israeli press commentary about the bombing speculated that Americans would now fully appreciate Israeli suffering at the hands of the Palestinians. A close adviser to Prime Minister Sharon, Zalman Shoval, noted that "no one is immune" to Palestinian terrorism.

- Israeli commentators assess that the Palestinians will stonewall on the investigation, highlighting for the US the difficulties Israel faces in entrusting security to the Palestinians as well as Israel's need to take unilateral security measures, according to Israeli press reports.

[redacted]
Israeli commentators across the spectrum are welcoming US statements of support in the wake of the attack, while expressing concern that the attack might reinforce what they perceive as Washington's growing disengagement from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the runup to the US Presidential election.

- Some observers say the attack will lead the US to pursue its public commitment to the roadmap with "no involvement on the ground."
- Some commentators also are expressing unease that the possible departure of international aid workers and NGOs in the Gaza Strip could create a "humanitarian vacuum" that Israel would be hard pressed to deal with.

Worries about diminishing US involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are reinforcing the Israeli public's pessimism about prospects for a peaceful resolution. Sharon is facing criticism from all sides, including members of his own party, that he lacks a vision for peace.

- A poll conducted in mid-October showed Sharon's approval rating had dropped from 43 to 36 percent, with 55 percent of respondents saying that his government does not know how to fight terror.
- Sharon's recent public statements supporting the roadmap were widely viewed in Israel as an effort to undercut the Israeli peace camp's "Geneva initiative" rather than an effort to promote talks. One Israeli commentator speculated that Sharon felt safe supporting the roadmap because it would not be implemented "anytime soon".